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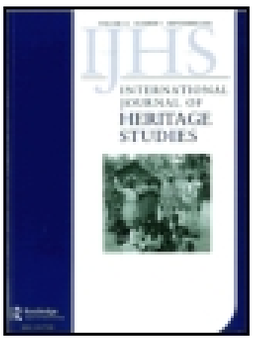

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Situating (in)significance

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we introduce the concept of '(in)significance' as a way to think about values in heritage, and in the attribution, recording, description, assessment and categorisation practices that characterise heritage processes. Our aim is to throw light on how this concept shapes, and is shaped by, contemporary heritage practices and outcomes. We consider the history of the idea of significance, particularly as it is defined in the Burra Charter, and trace its inheritance lines in settler nation states and capitalist economic structures, and highlight its retention of concepts of heritage value as both intrinsic and culturally attributed. Using international, mainly Anglophone examples, we review a range of case studies and examples of significance and insignificance, of significance assessment in practice, and the tensions between expert, institutional or 'official' values and broader concepts of heritage and attachment. We suggest that the dual or layered concept of '(in)significance' might allow for heritage practices that interact with emotions, memory, place and things in ways that are often not possible in the context of official heritage regimes because of rigid aesthetic and conservation paradigms, as well as identity and ownership claims and deeply invested national narratives.

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Why (in)significance?

One of us (TI) started thinking about the significance of insignificance back in 2011 after listening to a conference paper about a garden and orchard known as the Bustan Khayat in Haifa (Liberty-Shalev 2011), considered by some to be the only city in Israel where Arabs and Jews 'maintain a level of coexistence' (Kallus 2013, 100). The garden was created before the Second World War by a prominent Arab citizen, Hazeez Khayat, in a quirky, modernist style (Liberty-Shalev 2011). Upon the death of Khayat's daughter in 1972, it became the property of the City of Haifa and was neglected for many years (Liberty-Shalev 2011; Haifa Museum 2016). In the context of complex national tensions and local identity politics during that period, and not appealing to late 20th century taste, the garden was not then considered significant. Ruth Liberty-Shalev argued however, that this *insignificance* meant the place wasn't seized upon as central to, or representative of, any particular nationalist or local identity narratives or claims. Because it wasn't claimed to be Arab or Israeli, it became 'just a garden', and this allowed it to be unofficially used and experienced, and eventually to be nurtured and loved by local residents and volunteers.

While today this garden is described as significant (Haifa Museum 2016), its survival and reclaiming was made possible precisely because its *insignificance* opened up a space for uses and interactions not regulated by heritage claims or constraints. While even in the 1970s and '80s, the

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Bustan Khayat was clearly a *memory* place (the early 20th century pools, irrigation and plantings were conserved in their distinctive forms), in 2011 Ruth Liberty-Shalev described its value in terms of what the act of sharing and caring for this garden could build for the future of the local Haifa community – a space where Arab and Jewish communities could interact and participate without claims of identity or ownership dominating.

So how might we both better understand the significance of insignificance, as well as the fact that value attribution systems create regimes and areas of significance *and* insignificance – the consequences of which are rarely thought through? How might the dual concept of '(in)significance', which we will further define below, make a space for creative, future-making practices (Harrison et al. 2016) that interact with memory, place and things, but in ways that are often not possible in the context of official heritage regimes because of rigid aesthetic paradigms, urban or class conflict, identity politics, or dominant national narratives? For the Bustan Khayat, the actions undertaken in the space and time of insignificance have in turn generated values that are today expressed in more conventional terms of social value or significance – its moment of insignificance was transient but crucial to the way in which it gained new life outside the frames that usually shape understandings of heritage value – no doubt similar cultural and social processes could be described for many contemporary heritage places, as a number of the papers in this special issue explore.

While the history of the contemporary heritage movement clearly shows trends towards expanding definitions of heritage, recognition of more diverse forms of place attachment, and towards a more 'democratic' or inclusive recognition of values, here our intention is not to narrate a progressive history of heritage management. In this paper, and in this special issue, we explore the diverse processes and practices of value creation and negation, to understand how, why, and by whom values are articulated, constructed, consolidated, deconstructed or denounced. In other words, our aim is not to 'assess significance' but to throw light on how this category shapes, and is shaped by, contemporary heritage concepts, practices and outcomes.

In the field of heritage practice 'insignificant' could be taken to mean places, objects or collections judged to be unimportant, not worthy of consideration, meaningless, without power or influence; and thus not warranting protection under an official heritage regime. That is, insignificance can be seen as an antonym of significance. However, and as we go on to explore, we do not view or apply these terms as opposites – though recognise that there can be value in the application of terms such as unimportant and unworthy when used in a situational or relational sense. Rather, here we employ the term '(in)significance' as a device for thinking through the inherent duality of value concepts and value attribution practices and their effects and impacts, and to throw light on how culturally complex and multi-layered value concepts and judgements are operationalised and instrumentalised in forms of heritage management. Used in this way, the term (in)significance invites questions such as: Why and when is an item deemed significant and how does this process create forms of insignificance (i.e. historical and cultural contingencies and specificities)? Who has made that determination and for whom (i.e. the political economy of the heritage field)? Whose perspective is being represented (i.e. the politics of recognition)? And what is the role of bodies, emotions, the senses, subjectivity and tacit knowledge in values assessment (e.g. questions to do with ontological plurality, materiality and the politics of affect)?

Situating significance

Significance is a largely universal concept in heritage management, and used across a growing range of specialist fields including collecting, curation, archiving and conservation (e.g. Clavir 2002; Lloyd 2007; Russell and Winkworth 2009). The term is sometimes used synonymously and interchangeably with 'value' and forms the basis of what has been termed values-based heritage management (see for instance discussions in Pearson and Sullivan 1995; Avrami et al. 2000; De la Torre 2002, 2013; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016). Definitions of significance encompass a wide range of concepts of value and importance, and it is also used as a portmanteau term to 'carry' a melange of attributes,

meanings and attachments that are perceived as encompassed by heritage places and things. While the term 'cultural significance' is contained in the 1964 Venice Charter (ICOMOS 1964, Article, 1), it is more typically associated with the innovative work of the Australian Government in the mid-1970s (Hope 1974) and, most famously, incorporated into *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, first adopted in 1979 (Australia ICOMOS 2013). In the Burra Charter, cultural significance is defined as the 'aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations' (Australia ICOMOS 2013, Article 1.2). This is a meaning widely adopted by other jurisdictions and doctrinal texts, including, for example, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO 2011, 6). Similar meanings can be found in a range of scholarly-practice literature. For example, Marta de la Torre and Randall Mason (De la Torre and Mason 2002, 3) use the phrase cultural significance, 'to mean the importance of a site as determined by the aggregate of values attributed to it'; and in the field of objects and collections, significance 'refers to the values and meanings that items have for people and communities' (Russell and Winkworth 2009, 2). These understandings of significance can generally be situated within understandings of heritage as 'social action' (Byrne 2008) and 'cultural process' (Smith 2006) although, as we discuss, their genealogy is more complex.

In the field of natural heritage, The Burra Charter's 'sister' document – *Australian Natural Heritage Charter for the Conservation of Places of Natural Heritage Significance* – defines natural significance as 'the importance of *ecosystems, biodiversity* and *geodiversity* for their existence value or for present or future generations, in terms of their scientific, social, aesthetic and life-support value' (Commonwealth of Australia 2002, Article 1.3; italics in original). The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines the 'cultural and spiritual significance of nature as the inspirational, spiritual, cultural, aesthetic, historic and social meanings, values, feelings, ideas and associations that natural features and nature in general have for past, present and future generations of people – both individuals and groups' (IUCN in prep.; see also discussion in Brown and Verschuuren 2018). Thus there is conceptual diversity in the use and application of significance both within and across the fields of natural and cultural heritage. Since there is an increasing trend to question this intellectual tradition of separation and recognise these domains as inseparable, mutually constituted and entangled (Brown and Verschuuren 2018; Harrison 2015), these different assessment methods are an issue for practice, legislation and regulation because their use embeds and naturalises a particular cultural framework as 'universal' and neutral.

In the field of heritage practice today, significance is typically situated within a 'quaternity'[1] of concepts alongside attributes, values and thresholds. 'Attribute', a term widely used in World Heritage practice and processes (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2017), typically refers to the tangible features (cultural and natural) and intangible associations and practices that comprise a collection, place or practice (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2017; and see Cameron's paper this volume). 'Values' are typically defined as the meanings, positive and negative, ascribed to an attribute by individuals, communities and nation states. Elaborate regimes have been developed for defining and categorising values (for discussions of value regimes see De la Torre 2002; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016; Jones 2017). While our position is that all heritage values are culturally constructed (although see papers by Byrne; Olsen and Vinogradova this volume for a response to significance based in post-humanist and new materialist critiques), some regimes consider values to be embodied or intrinsic – the 'existence value' of flora and fauna species, for example (Commonwealth of Australia 2002).

'Threshold' often refers to the levels of importance ascribed to values (World, National, regional or local, for example), and can include attributions of rarity, representativeness, exceptionality, integrity, authenticity and condition. In the UK, thresholds were applied under a national review of designation in the 1990s to determine the level beyond which all examples of surviving monument types were deemed of 'national importance' and thus worthy of consideration for designation (Darvill, Saunders, and Startin 1987). In this context, 'significance' is constructed as the collective of values underpinned, evidenced or 'carried' by a range of attributes, and assessed in relation to

hierarchies of thresholds. In the early 2000s the Australian government overhauled the federal heritage system that had been introduced in the 1970s, based on an inventory known as the Register of the National Estate (1975–2006), to also introduce a strongly hierarchical, threshold-based system focused on a new National Heritage List. The earlier Register of the National Estate had not recognised thresholds of significance and, despite the national emphasis of the name, had been designed as a recognition of places of significance to any community (Ireland and Blair 2015, 11; and see; Bonyhady 1996 for history of the term 'National Estate'). We might therefore talk about methods that are within the frame of significance assessment (The Burra Charter process, for example) and those which are not, such as 'blanket protection' for antiquities of a certain age or type (e.g. shipwrecks, Aboriginal stone tools) or the 'comprehensive, adequate and representative' approaches, as we go on to discuss below (and see Cameron this volume on the example of the 2001 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage*). We also note that these different approaches to value and importance are often used together in heritage management systems, despite their contrasting epistemological underpinnings. In some situations, an ambiguous relationship can exist between significance and official or statutory protection. In the United Kingdom (UK) for example 'Scheduling' as a monument is at the Secretary of State's discretion, and is sometimes considered appropriate given the management constraints this designation would entail. Most if not all historic city centres in the UK contain buried archaeological deposits that most would agree to be of 'national importance' (the key requirement for Scheduling), but the constraints such a designation would entail are not considered appropriate in most circumstances. But before considering significance assessment in practice, we look more closely at the history of the idea of heritage significance.

Genealogies of significance

If we look both backwards and forwards in time from the key moment of the 1979 Burra Charter, some of the genealogical threads entangled in the concept of significance can be unravelled. The Burra Charter's definition was based upon terminology and concepts in *The Australian Heritage Commission Act*, 1975, which in turn was drafted in response to Australia signing the *UNESCO World Heritage Convention*. However, rather than use the Eurocentric terminologies of the World Heritage Convention itself, the *Australian Heritage Commission Act* was modelled upon what was judged to be the most relevant cognate example of national heritage legislation at the time, the USA's *National Historic Preservation Act*, 1966 (Byrne, Brayshaw, and Ireland 2003, 86). Tainter and Lucas' influential 1983 paper showed that the definition of significance in this *National Historic Preservation Act* could itself be traced back to the USA's 1906 *Antiquities Act*, which defined 'significance' in direct reference to the 'nation' as the key category within which values could be constituted and against which they could be measured (Tainter and Lucas 1983, 707). This concept of the nation, as simultaneously territory, identity, history and 'imagined community' of shared values (Anderson 1991) was the key framing device for this definition of heritage. As Smith has shown, discourses that construct heritage as a symbolic representation of identity have primarily promoted concepts of *national* identity, supported by the nationalising discipline histories of archaeology and history (Smith 2006, 30). This concept of *nation as heritage* firmly underpinned Australia's first examples of heritage legislation and policy (e.g. Byrne 1996; Ireland 2003; and see here Rico's paper this volume on the example of Qatar) and was clearly expressed in the term resurrected by former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam – the 'National Estate' – which as we have seen, was used to emphasise the government's 'curatorial' or stewardship role of the legacy it held in trust (Bonyhady 1996, 146).

The concept of heritage significance that had developed in the USA through the first half of the 20th century was largely then a device (*dispositif*) for making public decisions about heritage preservation; that is to say its purpose was to ensure that economic support for preservation was only allocated to 'cultural resources' that were demonstrably unique and irreplaceable within

a particular, public frame of reference (Tainter and Lucas 1983). It is perhaps key to note that this notion of heritage significance emerges from attempts to socially and legally reconcile cultural values within the context of a free market economy. The other significant characteristic of this 20th century concept of significance is that it was based upon the notion of intrinsic significance that we have introduced above: 'Significance is thus assumed to be an essential attribute of a cultural property, observable and recordable … ' (Tainter and Lucas 1983, 711). The approach to significance found in the 1979 version of the *Burra Charter* (Australia ICOMOS 2013), which introduced the phrase 'places of cultural significance', thus in some ways challenged contemporary European and American concepts and practices. The authors of the Burra Charter deliberately discarded the Eurocentric/colonialist term 'monument' and replaced it with 'places of cultural significance' and suggested that significance needed to be established by a public, transparent process prior to making management decisions. The charter also introduced a concept of social value and the notion that communities should be involved in determining that value (e.g. Byrne, Brayshaw, and Ireland 2003; Mendes Zancheti et al. 2009; Araoz 2013; Jones 2017). However, the Charter retained the concept of intrinsically significant heritage materials or 'fabric' alongside, and as well as, these ideas about culturally contingent values and the social practice or process of creating and ascribing them (Mendes Zancheti et al. 2009). This epistemological contradiction appears to be at the heart of many debates about values and the ongoing lack of methodological clarity around the process of 'significance assessment' (and see Lamprakos 2014; Walter 2014; Macdonald and Morgan 2018).

Turning to the key European Charters and their mission of universalising value concepts and standards for heritage conservation practice, the 1931 *Athens Charter on the Restoration of Ancient Monuments* did not explicate ideas about significance or values, but set out principles for the maintenance of 'monuments of artistic, historic or scientific interest', embedding what Mason termed a 'black box' approach to significance – where the nature of significance is assumed to be self-evident (Mason 2002, 8, 2004, 64). The term 'cultural significance' is used once in the still influential 1964 *Venice Charter* (Article 1). Importantly, the phrase is used in this Charter to contrast the values of 'great works of art' with what is termed more 'modest works which have acquired cultural significance with the passing of time', apparently broadening the remit of heritage conservation from the Western high art canon to include 'folk' traditions, but also recalling Riegl's concepts of age and memory values (Riegl [1903] 1982). Alois Riegl's influential and original 1903 work, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung (The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin)*, was prepared as a philosophical justification for early Austrian heritage legislation, setting out a theory of values still considered foundational for modern heritage conservation and articulating concepts of the perception of authenticity through visual qualities of age and time (Arrenhius 2004; Lamprakos 2014; Holtorf 2013, 2017; Walter 2014). As Arrhenius argues, Riegl's focus on the 'cult' of monuments, rather than the monuments themselves, and on how values are applied to 'objects in a secularised and Capitalist society', accurately prefigures later modernist and postmodernist debates in heritage conservation and memory studies (Arrenhius 2004, 79; and see for example; Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010). However, as Lamprakos (2014) argues, Riegl's project perhaps created the foundation for contemporary conservation's unresolved tension between positivist concepts of 'significance' derived from history and historical importance (as foregrounded in the Venice Charter), and the subjective perception of the qualities of age and memory (and see Holtorf 2017).

The authors behind the first version of the Burra Charter were explicit in their critique of the Venice Charter's narrow concept of heritage as 'monuments', and also about their aim of modifying these terms to make them workable and meaningful in an Australian context. This was articulated as arising from Australia's particular environmental and historical conditions, but also with the intent that these insights or approaches might eventually influence international ICOMOS and lead to the revision of the Venice Charter (Burke 2004, 55). However, at the 1978 General Assembly of ICOMOS in Moscow the recommendations of a 'Special Committee on the Revision of the Venice Charter' were, it is claimed, 'arbitrarily suppressed' (Burke 2004, 54). Burke has argued that the aims

of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter remained an 'irritant' to the European parent body for more than 25 years, with a 2004 ICOMOS meeting in Hungary (celebrating 40 years of the Venice Charter) resolving that: 'Recurrent initiatives both within and outside ICOMOS to amend or substitute the (Venice) Charter were based upon an incomplete understanding or misrepresentation of it' (Burke 2004, 56). While this international contestation around the Venice Charter concerns more than notions of significance, it is also clear that the Burra Charter's broader view of cultural significance challenged, for some interest groups, notions of what rightly constituted heritage, the primacy of European notions of 'great works', as well as gatekeeping around the types of expertise required to conserve this material heritage and to authorise who could determine its qualities (and see Araoz 2013).

Thus the concept of significance found in the Burra Charter has many inheritance lines, only some of which are reviewed here focusing on the Anglophone literature: the Venice Charter, the World Heritage Convention, as well as the American legal tradition of significance as framed by the settler nation, rather than the canon and its traditions of aesthetic and hermeneutic analysis (cf. Walter 2014, 640). Twentieth century American and Australian positivist definitions of significance reflect capitalist economic structures, colonial histories and reactions against Eurocentrism (but in somewhat different ways) by constituting the 'values' of the nation and its history as the determinants of significance.

Perhaps a final point to mention in this discussion of the genealogy of significance has been elaborated recently by Vidal and Dias' work on 'endangerment sensibility'. They argue that this sensibility 'stands at the heart of a network of concepts, values and practices' that aim to identify entities as threatened and to preserve them (Vidal and Dias 2016, 1). Their analysis highlights inventorying and ranking as key practices that emerge in response to this sensibility across a wide variety of fields, from biodiversity to archives, museums and heritage. Of particular importance to our discussion is that they tease out the way in which this 'sensibility' obfuscates how emotions are in fact integral 'to both the values and the sciences of endangerment', and that while empirical observations and scientific knowledge are involved, the *perception* of threat or endangerment 'emerges only in connection with certain values, feelings, interests, and views about the present and the future of communities and humanity at large' (Vidal and Dias 2016, 5). This statement clearly applies to our analysis of heritage values and the role of significance assessment, which was established as a pseudo-empirical method for management, an outcome if you will of the 'sensibility of endangerment'. As a mechanism for public accountability, significance assessment has thus worked to categorise values into clear and rational terms that appear distant from emotions and beliefs. For us this is a key point for our exploration of (in)significance.

Critiques of significance

At the heart of critiques of significance has been the widely acknowledged need to understand the cultural, discursive construction of heritage values, and whom they benefit or represent, particularly in the context of indigenous and other marginalised communities/identities, and other rights-based movements (e.g. Smith 2004, 2006; Smith and Waterton 2009; Larsen 2018). There have also been numerous attempts to generate typologies of values and assessment methods that are more inclusive, holistic and flexible (see De la Torre 2013; Fredheim and Khalaf 2016 for a review of this literature). In the arena of practice, the Australia ICOMOS 'Code of Ethics of Co-existence in Conserving Significant Places' aimed to establish the principle that competing or incommensurate values need not be resolved by heritage management, but should be respected and allowed to co-exist (Australia ICOMOS 1998). Equally, the European 'Faro' *Convention on the Value of Heritage to Society* (2005) speaks of the need to involve all people within society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage. English Heritage's (2008) Conservation Principles also highlight the need to consider Communal (including social) Value in the assessment of cultural heritage. Significance assessment methods have thus worked towards opening up curatorial and

heritage management processes with forms of participation and consultation with 'stakeholder' groups and a key theme of critique is therefore the role of experts and non-experts in values-based heritage management, and we will return to this theme in more detail below.

Relatively few cases have however, been made *against* a values-based heritage management approach, most preferring to concentrate on how to improve methods for identifying and assessing values. Exceptions to this include the 'living heritage' approach developed by Poulios, which focuses on the cultural and community continuities of places, arguing for a revision of the conservation paradigm which necessarily fixates on preserving a particular past, arguing for a heritage management of creative engagements with place, narratives and materials (Poulios 2010, 2011). Poulios' approach echoes the ethos of the 'experimental preservation' movement which similarly highlights how preservation creates values, rather than preserves them, and reconfigures conservation as a generative practice (Otero-Pailos, Fenstad Langdalen, and Arrenhius 2016: and in a related vein see; DeSilvey 2017). Walter, on the other hand, has suggested that narratives rather than values, could provide an alternative way to generate accounts of material culture's linking of past, present and future (Walter 2014). Drawing on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, Walter suggests that a narrative framework could better incorporate concepts such as change over time and non-human agency than values-based frameworks. Pocock et al. also advocate a narrative or 'stories' based approach and argue for the potential of this method to intervene in heritage management's fixation on material heritage and sites, which has been so damaging to Indigenous peoples in Australia (Pocock, Collett, and Baulch 2015).

Also relevant here are debates around the category of social significance or value (Byrne, Brayshaw, and Ireland 2003). Broadly defined as 'collective attachment' to places and things, this value description is used to encompass cultural practices, forms of memory, oral narratives, concepts of belonging and identity, social capital and other concepts concerned with community well-being and regeneration (Jones 2017). Jones suggests that although heritage charters and policies reveal a growing emphasis on this so-called 'category' of value, in practice it remains commonly conflated with values derived from the disciplinary formations of history, archaeology and aesthetics. She concludes that it is more useful to think of social value as a process rather than a 'fixed value category that can be defined and measured', and that this observation in fact applies to all value categories which only appear more stable in the way that they are fixed through disciplinary histories. In her paper in this volume Rico also highlights the limitations of concepts of social value where pre-existing attachments or values are re-framed as 'heritage' values, within the context of Qatar and material culture and practices associated with Islam.

Despite these many long-standing critiques, the notion that heritage values are discursively constructed, contingent and created through practice, remains difficult to integrate into heritage practice, policy, legislation, management and conservation. At their extreme, positions are polarised between those that see values as intrinsic, and thus able to be conserved through 'best practice' conservation (e.g. Lipp et al. 2012), and the position that there is no such 'thing' as heritage (Smith 2006). While examples of the former extreme position might now be rare in Anglophone literature, tensions do persist. As we highlighted earlier, Australia's Burra Charter and Register of the National Estate embodied this tension and, as Winter has suggested, 'there is an uneasy ambiguity and frequent unspoken slippage, in critical interpretivist approaches and a concern for the actual conservation of culture' (Winter 2013, 396). Smith and Campbell (2017) argue that the problematic terms 'tangible values' and 'intangible values' have been introduced into heritage management and policy documents in recent years to *manage* the impact of critiques of heritage as social process and of the expansion of the category of 'intangible cultural heritage'. While this usage may represent a genuine attempt to change practice, Smith and Campbell argue that it actually works to exacerbate the dichotomy between tangible and intangible heritage by differentiating the values applied to material things (Smith and Campbell 2017, 28). So while the development of twentieth century heritage management, in the Anglosphere at least, is often narrated as an evolution from the ostensibly shared historical and aesthetic values and stewardship ethics of the Venice Charter,

through to the impact of a broad range of 'heritage as social process' critiques, in reality these intellectual traditions continue to co-exist within the black-boxed policy and management structures of official heritage conservation. Heritage management necessarily deploys cultural value and benefit propositions in a public policy and economic context, and in a manner which tends to obfuscate the messy, contested nature of cultural values, with a veneer of expertise, objectivity and method. Indeed, recently Macdonald and Morgan have characterised significance assessment as a form of modernist 'magic' that disguises complex cultural judgements and choices behind what is often described in practice guidelines as a 'simple' or 'common sense' method or process (Macdonald and Morgan 2018). They use the term 'magic' in the sense that significance assessments create a seductive order from unruly cultural reality in an attempt to contain and harness the power of things for particular purposes. Assessments of significance have an impact on the world; they work to create a reality they appear to describe, a key tenet of recent work which focuses on heritage as a future assembling technique and project (e.g. Harrison 2016; Holtorf 2018; Meskell 2018). In a related vein, in their paper in this volume, Jeffrey et al. explore the effects and impacts of recording practices as an 'active mode of value generation rather than a passive technical event'. They show how records are used to *create and validate* significance, and how the lack of records may in turn create insignificance. They explore how their case study communities mobilised digital technologies to both confirm and challenge authorised regimes of heritage significance, arguing that the affordances of digital renderings, their seductive, forensic depth, bring a new techno-fetishism to the capturing of 'significance'. This frame tends to equate *greater significance* with the need for greater technical whizzbangery, detail and accuracy of record – thereby reinforcing the positivist, 'scientistic materialism' of authorised heritage regimes (Winter 2013).

Other critiques have highlighted how formal definitions of heritage significance tend to be framed by the nation, by purportedly objective renderings of value, and by their use to justify the 'market failure' of heritage in capitalist economies (Ireland and Blair 2015, 10). In fact, Cameron's paper in this volume notes that recent analyses by French sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre use heritage as a key field for understanding how values are constructed and consumed in the context of late capitalism (Boltanski and Esquerre 2017; Heinich 2009, 2011). This context for value equations has militated against the engagement of heritage management processes with the quotidian, affective materiality of heritage and has rendered significance as something that is found rather than made. This is despite considerable and growing research which explores these diverse dimensions of heritage and place attachment, drawing on similarly focused research in a wide range of disciplines, often referred to as the 'affective turn' (Clough 2007). Denis Byrne has observed that while heritage studies focus much attention on trauma and violence, 'there is curiously little directed to what might be thought of as the other end of the spectrum of human experience: pleasure, happiness and love' (Byrne 2013), highlighting how these experiences contrast with the communal scale feelings often associated with heritage value or significance – for example the communal intensities of pride, honour and love of country (Ahmed 2004; Ahmed 2010). In this vein, Ireland has used Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* (Pamuk 2008, 2012) as a critique of heritage significance, suggesting that Pamuk mobilises insignificant, everyday objects in his novel, and his real-life museum of the same name, to constitute an embodied experience of materiality and emotion, rather than a *representation* of particular values or histories (Ireland 2017). The insignificant thus becomes significant within the small-scale socialities of happiness and domestic life.

These critiques collectively highlight the methodological and conceptual weaknesses of values-based significance assessment as expressed in key doctrine. We agree that narrative-based approaches have potential for heritage management, and that such approaches demand the development of appropriate methods to generate accounts encompassing change over time, memory, materiality and emotions. It is clear that many such approaches are well-demonstrated in contemporary heritage research and practice, such as in the work of the 'experimental preservationists' mentioned above (Otero-Pailos, Fenstad Langdalen, and Arrenhius 2016; DeSilvey 2017), and that

the challenge remains, as ever, to reflect such approaches and concepts in management regimes and official systems. For heritage significance is surely, if nothing else, a response to what Ross Gibson terms 'narrative hunger' and could be seen as the extent to which places, things and practices can generate a rich array of accounts about themselves (Gibson 2014).

Significance assessment in practice

> Australia has a rich natural and cultural heritage that underpins our sense of place and national identity and makes a positive contribution to the nation's wellbeing. We value our heritage and have a strong desire to see Australia's significant heritage places recognised and protected. (Australian Government 2015, 3)

In this section we turn to a specific comparison of the different value regimes applied in Australia as a case study, and in order to consider ways in which collections, places and practices may be valued, and by implication devalued. As we have seen, valuing heritage has a particular history and can take a range of forms, of which significance assessment (Figure 1) is one methodology. As illustrated in the quote above, significance is seen as pre-eminent in the rhetoric of the Australian Government's *Heritage Strategy* (Australian Government 2015) and significance assessment methods have been embedded in parts of Australia's heritage management system since the 1970s. Table 1 provides a summary of the value and/or significance regimes used in Australia across the officially separated fields of natural, Indigenous and 'historic' (or post-contact) heritage places. It illustrates how the heritage system in Australia typically separates or silos these fields in laws, policies, administrative structures, disciplinary expertise and on-ground management practices (e.g. Adams and English 2005) and how the construction of value is either extended to all heritage items (e.g. material expressions of pre-1788 Indigenous culture) or assessed as being Nationally significant and thus 'outstanding' (e.g. Australia's National Heritage List) or representative of a class of things (e.g. Australia's protected area system).

Australia is a federation in which the administration of heritage – both cultural and natural – is shared between Commonwealth, State/Territory and local governments. Australia has 20 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List (12 natural sites, four cultural sites and four mixed sites); 117 places have been entered onto Australia's National Heritage List (at March 2020); thousands of places are inscribed on State/Territory heritage registers; tens of thousands of places on local heritage schedules; and hundreds of thousands of Indigenous 'sites' on State/Territory registers (Table 1). In addition, Australia's heritage is also represented in non-statutory registers (National Trust Heritage Register and Birdlife Australia's Working List of Australian Birds, for example) as well as in the extensive collections held in museums – both public and private – and herbaria across the continent.

Of course, what is outlined here is the Australian heritage system as a three-part, hierarchical framework of 'idealised forms'. These forms do not account for the impacts of politics, power, discourse, and contestation that are hallmarks of contemporary heritage practice (Harrison 2013; Smith 2006). This can be seen, for example, in the failed attempts to list the Tarkine – a rugged, forested landscape in northwest Tasmania – on the National Heritage List (Macintosh and Wilkinson 2012); the contestation between the recognition of Aboriginal shell middens as mundane campsites by archaeologists and as ancestral/spiritual places by Aboriginal people (Greer 2010; Meehan 1982); and the politics of erasure of Aboriginal peoples' visibility from the post-1788 landscape (Byrne 2003; Ireland 2015; Irish 2017).

A key issue challenging the Australian approach is the culture-nature duality (see for example Byrne, Brockwell, and O'Connor 2013; Head and Muir 2007). The problematic nature of this binary can be seen in the history of nature conservation whereby Australia's Indigenous people were 'collapsed into nature as part of the flora and fauna' (Weir 2012, 7), while at the same time it was not uncommon in the 1960s and 1970s for 'old huts, homesteads, stockyards and other traces of white habitation to be removed in order to "restore" park landscapes to a state of nature, or . . . to fabricate

Table 1. Comparative summary of typical significance regimes operating across the fields of natural and cultural (Indigenous and historic) heritage in Australia. The table is a generalised summary and thus masks the mix of significance assessment approaches operating across different national, State/Territory and local heritage regimes. Adapted from Brown (2018).

		Cultural heritage	
	Natural heritage	Indigenous	Historic
Components	Geodiversity; biodiversity &/or biocultural diversity	Sites; whole-of-landscape or 'Country'	Places/landscapes, practices, collections
Value method	Comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) sample of 89, continent-wide, ecologically distinct bioregions	'Blanket' protection whereby all 'sites' are protected from harm, regardless of significance	Threshold-based values approach (i.e. significance assessment)
Management authorities	Protected area agencies; Indigenous communities	State/Territory heritage agencies; Aboriginal organisations	National/State/Territory Heritage Councils; local government
Extent	National Reserve System covers 137.5 million hectares, or 17.9% of Australia's land area (at Jackson 2014; Jackson et al. 2016, 29). Includes 67 million hectares (at Jones 2017) reserved as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs)	More than 400,000 'sites' on State/Territory based heritage registers	Over 5,000 State/Territory listed items; more than 50,000 items on local government registers
Expertise	Ecology, Geology, Hydrology, Nature conservation, Planning	Indigenous people, Anthropology, Archaeology, History	Architecture, Archaeology, History, local communities

the fiction of pure nature' (Byrne, Brockwell, and O'Connor 2013, 3). That is, for nature conservation practice and philosophy, European heritage, like introduced plant and animal species, was considered 'invasive' and thus *insignificant* in the discourse of nature conservation. At the same time, the physical remains of Aboriginal pre-colonial heritage became fixed in 'early European views of Aboriginal cultural stasis and stagnation' and, in this frame, Aboriginal heritage was recognised as *significant* in the discourse of nature conservation (Byrne, Brockwell, and O'Connor 2013, 3).

The complexities of the nature-culture duality continue today and are illustrated in the case of domestic gardens contained within national parks across Australia (Brown 2015, 2018). Typically, such places are 'inherited' at the point when private properties are declared as parks. The challenge of such legacies for park management extends across managing both natural and cultural heritage. For nature conservation, domestic gardens are framed as a threat, particularly where they comprise, but not necessarily constrain, non-native and non-endemic plant species. That is, in the constructs of nature conservation, domestic gardens are insignificant and consequently management actions that destroy and remove such places are enabled. For cultural heritage management, small-scale domestic gardens are seldom recognised as 'authorised' heritage (that is, listed on statutory registers) because they are typically valued by individuals, family groups and/or small friendship circles rather than by broader community or cultural groups. Thus in the field of cultural heritage management, they are rendered insignificant because they do not meet social value criteria which have been framed in terms of significance to a 'community or group' (e.g. Office of Environment and Heritage 2017). Treated as insignificant within both cultural and natural significance assessment regimes, such gardens are in a no win-no win situation in the Australian heritage system.

A second example illustrating the challenge to significance regimes centres on Australian Aboriginal stone artefacts. These objects are useful to our discussion because of their capacities to be simultaneously powerful and powerless in the field of heritage practice. In the context of Australia's state/territory heritage legislation, stone artefacts are largely recognised for their archaeological or scientific value – that is, for the evidence of past technologies and behaviour that they are construed as embodying within an archaeological frame (Brown 2020). Typically, stone artefacts are characterised as inert and commonplace, the latter evidenced in their ubiquity across the Australian landscape. Significance in this context is largely attributed on the basis of antiquity (typically associated with stratified, datable deposits) and large and concentrated assemblages. Isolated stone artefacts and those in 'disturbed' contexts are seldom recognised as of value, since their capacity to 'answer' archaeological research questions is viewed as negligible. By contrast, there is increasing evidence and documentation of the power of ordinary (and insignificant in an Australian legislative sense) stone artefacts in the contexts of Aboriginal peoples' contemporary, lived experience. For at least some Aboriginal people, connections to stone objects have contemporary social meanings (i.e. artefacts are significant as material proof and affective markers of the presence of ancestors) and spiritual ties (i.e. able to transmit 'special feelings' connected with familial ancestors and 'power' associated with find locales) (see Byrne 2013; Harrison 2004, 198–200). Thus, while stone artefacts are becoming increasingly powerful, and re-asserting their influence, in spiritual and political ways for Aboriginal individuals and collectives, these same objects appear to be powerless in reconceptualising the affective values of stone artefacts in a legislative sense. Thus, the values and materiality of Aboriginal stone artefacts are continually folded into multiple binary categories: significant and insignificant, powerful and powerless, influential and ineffectual. This situation illustrates a fluidity in the affordances of objects as much as the subjectivity of those communities (archaeologists and Aboriginal people, for example) attributing value.

Together, the dual (in)significance attributed to some Aboriginal stone artefacts and most domestic gardens in protected areas challenge the ways in which Australia's heritage registers are constructed. These examples highlight the artificial boundaries established between natural, Indigenous and historic heritage regimes and, consequently, the inability to recognise the

composite of intersecting values. This situation also points to the inability of different forms of heritage expert practice to negotiate significance.

Expert and non-expert significance

This section turns to explore questions of expertise in the context of recent heritage practices in the UK. Given that significance is assessed according to a range of criteria and in a diversity of legislative, policy and local contexts, then those responsible for making these decisions and judgements becomes a relevant if not central concern. With changes in the way significance is defined, along with an expansion in the range of situations in which it is used, the changing role of decision makers also becomes key. This is a discussion we might usefully frame in terms of the heritage expert, and what this label actually means. In the edited collection, 'Who Needs Experts?' (Schofield 2014), these issues are explored from the perspective of multiple case studies and theoretical positions, concluding that heritage expertise has depth but also considerable breadth. We (as professional heritage practitioners) are closely familiar with the former, in the sense of highly qualified specialists in whom there is confidence and whose judgements are traditionally trusted – specialists who know much about something specific. In some contexts however, professionals may be less familiar and less comfortable with the latter – the local expert who knows a little about a lot, but may know their place better than anybody.

The heritage expert is traditionally conceived as someone with specialist knowledge and training who can deploy that 'expert eye', that 'insight' to the benefit of the built environment or the heritage community which has some stake in it, as owners, occupiers or as members of a special interest group. In a helpful discussion, Hølleland and Skrede (2018) theorise the role of heritage expertise in liberal democracies, placing it within a wider multidisciplinary framework, concluding that we are not all heritage experts, in the narrow use of the term. And this last point is critical. By any traditional model, people without specialist knowledge defer to the expert to make informed and appropriate decisions on their behalf. But there is difficulty with this, and that difficulty concerns what constitutes expert knowledge and what is meant by 'heritage', both of which are often if not typically 'narrowly defined'. Expert knowledge ranges from specialist advice about artefact or building conservation (the narrow view) to informed views on place-making guided by the experience of residency, past or present. The latter typically comprises people expressing opinions based around the principles of social justice often promoting what they consider appropriate or sustainable and in character with the place they occupy and inhabit today. One might say that 'local people are the experts at living where they do', or put another way, that they know their place better than anybody (and here the term 'place attachment' has particular significance, see for example Manzo and Devine-Wright 2014). They may not be able to identify particular architectural features on a familiar historic building; but they may be better placed to consider the options for new housing or a by-pass, and what might be considered sustainable development. Heritage is very largely about place and identity and in these terms everybody within the local heritage community shares some degree of expertise through lived experience and close familiarity. As we have tracked in this article, the rise of notions of social significance has meant that it has become common for authorities to recognise the knowledge and understanding that exists at this local level, and will often seek it out in a new style of consultation: not presenting what they think to a community, and gaining reaction to it; but asking them what they think as a first step in the process. Thomas (2000) has helpfully described this changing landscape in the UK and how the role of the state heritage official, 'can no longer be one of unquestioned, and unquestionable, authority' (Thomas 2000, 197). Rather, Thomas argued for a role as,

> 'guide and facilitator … it might be about engaging more closely with other groups in society who wish to explore their own pasts, or the pasts of others. It may involve developing dialogues with such groups, rather than being somewhat aloof from them. And it may involve helping to empower these groups, giving them tools and guidance to pursue their own explorations of the past.'

In environmental psychology the distinction has been drawn between these two viewpoints, which Schachtel ([1959] 2001) and later Porteous (1996) described in terms of 'autocentric' and 'allocentric' modes of perception. The subject-centred autocentric mode of perception emphasises how a person feels. As Schachtel [1959] 2001, 83) describes it, 'there is a close relation, amounting to a fusion, between sensory quality and pleasure or unpleasure feelings, and the receiver reacts primarily to something impinging on him (sic).' The allocentric mode is characterised by objectification – here the emphasis is on what the object is like; there is either, 'no relation or a less pronounced or direct relation between perceived sensory qualities and pleasure-unpleasure feelings' (Schachtel [1959] 2001, 83). Schofield has previously described how this relates to heritage participation and place attachment (Schofield 2009). In summary, the heritage expert will characteristically adopt an allocentric mode of perception (detached, scientific, with a good appreciation of the wider context), while the local resident will have an autocentric relationship with a place that matters to them (being close, immediate, and intimate). The debate about expertise, and whose decisions and thoughts about heritage count, can helpfully be explained within this framework. It also clearly shows how and why tensions can arise.

In the UK this approach towards recognising the wider benefits of an autocentric approach is seen in two recent initiatives which put this 'local knowledge' at the heart of heritage thinking: local listing and neighbourhood planning. Local listing allows 'heritage communities' (here defined in the terms of the 2005 Faro Convention) to give recognition to buildings or places that are of local significance, but which do not meet national criteria. As the Historic England (2012) guidance states:

> 'Local heritage listing is a means for a community and a local planning authority to identify heritage assets that are valued as distinctive elements of the local historic environment. It provides clarity on the location of assets and what it is about them that is significant, helping to ensure that strategic local planning properly takes account of the desirability of their conservation.'

Jackson (2014) presents the example of Bradford Odeon (a former cinema in Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK), a site locally appreciated but which did not meet the criteria for national designation. Here the threat of demolition led to several failed attempts to have it listed. In Bradford there was no Local List, yet local feeling towards the cinema was strong and clearly expressed. There was a sense that the 'experts' did not understand the building, or what it meant to local people; these experts were not from Bradford after all! The example makes an important point: that local communities can be left disappointed if a treasured building is not considered 'worthy' of national designation. Therefore, to have the opportunity to act locally ensures that heritage values are accommodated and that future management is placed on a more secure foundation. Where local lists do exist, there is a clear sense that the addition of locally valued heritage sites to them can successfully give voice to locally felt perceptions about value, identity, community and sense of place.

Neighbourhood planning is the right in the UK, under *The Localism Act 2011*, for local communities to guide development in their local areas through the production of Neighbourhood Development Plans. The policies contained within these plans are then used to determine the outcomes of planning applications. The local parish or town council will lead on neighbourhood planning in their areas. The Localism Act recognises that not all communities are residential in nature and in areas that are predominantly commercial then a business-led neighbourhood forum can be established. The Local Planning Authority remains involved and makes decisions at key stages of the process, such as defining the neighbourhood area within which the Neighbourhood Plan will have effect. It will also organise the independent examination of the plan and the community referendum that is held at the end of the process. This referendum is an important part of the process allowing those that live in the neighbourhood area to decide whether the Neighbourhood Development Plan comes into effect or not (see Thorpe-on-the-Hill Parish Council n.d. for an example of a Neighbourhood Plan).

While less formal, other examples exist of projects that have attempted to encourage community participation in heritage activity including the articulation of views on significance and the meaning of particular buildings and places for those communities. It is also recognised that some communities need the facilitation of experts (as Thomas 2000 put it) more than others. An example is the work undertaken with homeless people in England (Kiddey 2017). Here homeless communities in two English cities participated in a study that placed them at the centre of a heritage project to explore subaltern experiences and perceptions of the urban landscape. The study involved interviews, fieldwork including 'walking and talking' tours, excavation of a homeless place (see Crea et al. 2014) and memory mapping. An example from the walking and talking tours involved a place of significance to two homeless men in York, the Scarborough Railway Bridge (in reality two adjoining bridges – a railway bridge and a footbridge), which Mark described as,

> 'our place by the river. … I really like it for the fact it's the Scarborough to London line. I was born in Scarborough and I moved to London for the music … that's also where I was first homeless … I like the fact this bridge goes between two places that are important to me. … I like the sound of the trains rumbling overhead and that the river is constantly changing. It makes me feel that I could go somewhere. I could go anywhere from here.' (Kiddey 2017, 103-4).

Here, once again, (in)significance is multi-layered. The bridge is neither nationally designated, nor is it on the provisional Local List for York, yet it is clearly a landmark for tourists, residents, rowers, and at least two homeless men. It is also taken for granted, an everyday place in a nationally significant historic urban landscape. Since Mark's reflective comments the bridge has been transformed to provide easier pedestrian access across the river. Significantly, while the footbridge has been replaced by a wider modern example, the historic rail bridge remains as does their co-location.

In heritage as in life, good decisions are those that are informed. At the root of all heritage decisions and judgements should be an understanding of why things or places matter, recognising that values come in very different forms and mean very different things to different people: there is the authorised heritage framework (after Smith 2006; Smith, Mauch Messenger, and Soderland 2010) through which official and generally traditional heritage values are used to help determine heritage decisions. Here historical, evidential and to an extent also aesthetic values help determine significance and shape outcomes, such as planning decisions. Where these criteria are applied to a building that is felt not to meet the required threshold, an often disappointed local community may feel that officially at least their heritage asset is deemed to be insignificant. Traditionally, that was the end of the matter. But now there is another less formal, locally grounded but increasingly authorised framework in which the local community can make decisions about their own local assets. In this situation places that do not meet official criteria for significance might be deemed locally important. There are also now examples of practice involving non-traditional communities in their local heritage (notably and for example Kiddey 2017). Usually local communities will value nationally recognised assets, even though local places might mean more to them. But sometimes this official heritage means nothing. As Gard'ner's (2004) example of Tower Hamlets (London) has shown, the local (in this case Bengali) community can have negligible or no attachment to local buildings designated according to national criteria, while valuing those buildings and spaces that fail to meet them. In some ways this example is central to our argument on (in)significance and its position within contemporary heritage thinking.

Conclusion

We began with questions about the significance of insignificance, and how the concept of '(in) significance' might open a space for heritage practices that engage with memory, materiality, emotions and the sensuality of places and things, as well as the political economy of significance, in ways often not possible within official heritage regimes because of thresholds, hierarchies, and other management paradigms. In establishing the social contract for heritage conservation the

doctrine of significance has become almost inimical to the everyday, the personal, the familial, and the small scale. Significance assessment, and heritage work more generally, with its distinctive traditions of engagement in the affective domain of materiality needs to be approached as about more than discursive structures and the politics of representation, but also as a process that is co-produced between humans, non-humans, environments and materials (Harrison 2013, 113; Jones 2010; and see Byrne, Olsen and Vinogradova, and Jeffrey et al. this volume). We found that gardens, such as the Bustan Khayat in Haifa and the relic gardens encompassed within Australian national parks, are particularly evocative examples to think about in this framework: perhaps because gardens remain 'gardens' only if they are nurtured and remade, and how they depend on human and non-human interactions, focused always on enacting the future. As Olsen and Vinogradova ask 'Is significance necessarily a voluntary attribute of humanly assigned value or may it be differently conceived, as something *enacted* rather than ascribed and, thus, also as more autonomously emanated?' (Olsen and Vinogradova this volume, our italics), highlighting the complexity of human–object–environment entanglements and moving the discussion towards a consideration of the non-human factors that mediate discourse and material survival.

Byrne also reminds us that heritage is in itself a *value*, as well as a system for finding and producing values, that has distanced itself from, and perhaps tried to replace in some spheres, the spiritual or supernatural values or beliefs that have always animated human/place/object interactions. While much research has explored how heritage is a form of secular enchantment through the experience of numinous authenticity (e.g. Jones 2010; Holtorf 2013), heritage sets itself up as an alternative set of values to religious or spiritual beliefs or values: a system that is rational in its historicity, its technically verified dates and scientifically accurate restorations (Byrne this volume). A related point is made by Jeffrey et al. regarding the practices of heritage recording which can also be seen as a form of enacting and ascribing values, rather than a detached, technical interaction (this volume).

As a device for public accountability, significance has worked to categorise values into clear and rational terms that appear distant from emotions, and from small scale sources of pleasure and their memory. While the insignificance of the quotidian, the familiar and familial is reinforced by heritage's sweeping narratives of nation and monumentality, and while significance is closely tied to arguments for conservation and the commitment of scarce community resources, this dichotomy is seemingly inescapable, and encountered as the natural order of things. However alternative forms of generating accounts of materiality and place attachment, of narratives, and complex and multi-layered relationships in both social and material forms, are a rich vein in research in heritage studies and related disciplines. We suggest that (in)significance is one way of approaching the multiple aspects of value equations, and the generative capacity of heritage management practices, as well as their limits, and limiting effects, when applied as neutral judgements.

Note

1. We use the term quaternity here to echo its religious undertones – implied in the 1954 Encyclical of Pope Pius XII <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_11101954_ad-caeli-reginam.html> that came close to recognising that Roman Catholic Christianity was a quaternity, inclusive of Mary the 'Mother of God', rather than a trinity. We see the religious comparison as echoing the fervour with which some individuals and heritage regimes debate doctrine.

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